

(a)way station: the Architectural Spaces of Migration

Architecture et Al.

Paul Kariouk and Mabel O. Wilson
36 Orange Street #1
Brooklyn, New York 11201
t/f: 718.875.8949

(A)way station is a traveling architectural exhibition that investigates the psychological and physical dimension of migration in relation to domestic space and the city. It is a full-scale construction that provides a critique of the temporary, urban home of the displaced subject--the migrant; it becomes a vessel that contains the belongings of peoples in migration. (A)way station is funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and two supporting university grants from the University of Florida and California College of Arts and Crafts.

The phenomenon of migration's vast shifting populations, often destined for the metropolis, ranks among the greatest influences upon urban space. For economic reasons these peoples do not alter urban form in immediately apparent ways--the processes by which they negotiate their surrendered cultures and new urban settings unfold not in the city's public realm, but within the intimate confines of their domestic spaces. Unlike conventional domestic sites, domestic space for most of the world's migrants is completely provisional--it is either the first transition point in a long period of assimilation or a place where life is suspended preceding a return to their original home. In both cases these homes constitute *way-stations* between the previous home and an imagined home to which they aspire.

As (a)way station is a traveling exhibition it is constructed for no exact place; it transforms itself as it is unpacked according to the conditions in which it is installed. At each initial proposed venue--New York City (Storefront for Art and Architecture), Los Angeles (Form Zero Gallery), Chicago (University of Illinois at Chicago), and Berlin (Aedes Gallery East)--there will be parts of the installation that can neither be unpacked nor reconstructed because of spatial limitations. This condition of indeterminacy is akin to that of the migrant who cannot move fluidly in his/her new context and whose ability to adapt is arrested by unfamiliar social, political, and cultural conditions that provide limited choices. To this end the author Franz

Fanon has written, "I am for somewhere and for something else...in the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself."¹ The "lost" fragments of the *(a)way station* that become deleted or rearranged due to the spatial particularities of each venue are recalled through drawn representations of the complete installation. Through a process of accretion of its own site documentation at the different venues, the project will become a narrative of its own journey.

As the interpellated subject of migration, the installation's viewer inhabits the *(a)way station*. By choreographing sightlines, aural cues provided by spoken narratives, and movement within a field of (15) 2'x2'x8' illuminated structures, migration is posed as the nexus of both private desires and public forces. Assembled from possessions taken in transit--furniture, momentos, and clothing and construction materials comprising their interim home--plywood, linoleum, and carpet--the installation's walls express the conditional nature of migration's architecture.

We are currently seeking funding from a number of sources for a book project entitled Domestic Space-Urban Migration, that is, in part, a record of *(a)way station*'s journey. In the book's essays the temporary domestic spaces associated with migration serve as the lens through which urban space is reinterpreted. The essays are provided by scholars in the fields of architecture, urban studies, cultural studies, and social theory. In addition to these essays, the book documents the *(a)way station* installation. At this time Sharon Haar, Christopher Reed, Anthony Vidler, and Mark Wigley have expressed great enthusiasm for the book project and are confirmed as contributors. Other invited contributors include Sandra Cisneros, Douglas Crimp, Martha Rosler, Richard Plunz, Henry Urbach, and Ella Shohat.

Size and Material:

(A)way station is comprised of (15) - 2'-0" x 2'-0"x 8'-0" (vertical) structures. Each structure is composed of four panels held together by bolted connections that can be disassembled for shipping and storage. Two sides of the structures are constructed from panels of 3/4" plywood and two sides are

¹Franz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks. New York: Grove Press, 1967, p. 229.

fabricated from layered plywood strips and plexi-glas interspersed with domestic wares cast in resin and sectioned pieces of furniture, appliances, and interior finishes. Approximately one half of the structures have operable drawers; as well as small sliding panels containing drawings silk-screened onto plexi-glas sheets. Each structure also has its own source of lighting (two 60w incandescent light bulbs.) Three structures have an audio component: a tape recorder and small speaker. Included in the exhibition is one table (approx. 24"x18"x42") that incorporates additional project drawings.

(A)way station has been designed to be exhibited in a number of possible configurations. The most likely arrangement for Storefront for Art and Architecture given its interior plan and dimensions will be in a linear arrangement. The estimated length of structures positioned in this way in the center of Storefront will be 40'-0"x 2'-0"x8'-0" (including space in between each segment for the passage of viewers.) The project does not require use of existing wall space, though we will need to have the walls/floor/ceiling painted by Storefront in advance.

Time and Assembly:

The installation of (a)way station requires a minimum of two people to assemble and erect each of the fifteen segments, though three people working in concert would prove beneficial. The only tools needed for the assemblage of the structures is a ratchet wrench and screw driver. The estimated time for unpacking and assembling project is 12-16 hours. Architecture et Al. will provide one worker to assist with the installation. An electrical source (two 110v outlets) is needed for the interior lighting of the structures.

Shipping:

All shipping costs will be paid for by Architecture et Al.

Project Announcement:

We expect that announcements and advertisement of the exhibition will be paid for by Storefront for Art and Architecture and coordinated with the full participation of Architecture et Al.

